

August 13, 2014

Dan Ruben  
Executive Director  
Equal Justice America  
Building II, Suite 204  
13540 East Boundary Road  
Midlothian, VA 23112

Dear Mr. Ruben:

I am writing to thank you and Equal Justice America for helping to fund my 2014 summer internship at New Haven Legal Assistance Association in New Haven, Connecticut. My experience at NHLAA was incredibly rewarding and confirmed my desire to pursue a career working directly with disadvantaged people. I am so grateful to have had the opportunity to begin developing important client interaction skills while making a big difference in a few of their lives.

As an intern in the housing unit at NHLAA, I interviewed clients, researched federal and state housing program regulations, negotiated stipulated agreements with opposing counsel both in and out of court, and represented clients at administrative hearings. I was immediately entrusted with a great deal of responsibility, and I was meeting with clients on my own by the end of my first week. By the end of the summer, I had successfully represented a client—appealing a denial of his application to a federally subsidized housing complex for disabled individuals—from start to finish with very little supervision.

One of the most rewarding client experiences I had this summer was helping “Rosie,” a single mother of four young children, avoid an imminent eviction and almost certain homelessness. Rosie had previously entered a yearlong repayment agreement on a large debt to her local housing authority, but because she missed a lot of work to deal with her youngest son’s sudden medical problems, she recently defaulted on several months’ payments. The property manager was fed up and, after refusing Rosie’s attempts to make up for her missed payments, indicated that she would not allow her to stay under any circumstances. In our office, Rosie told me tearfully that she had contacted every family shelter in the area and that they all had long waiting lists. She was distraught at the idea that her four children would have to live out of their car because of her. After meeting with Rosie on my own, I discussed a strategy with my supervisor and began conducting research for the upcoming court date. The next week at court, I proposed a resolution to the housing authority’s attorney and, with the help of my supervisor, we negotiated a new repayment agreement that would allow Rosie to remain in her apartment.

Rosie's story is certainly not uncommon for a legal services housing unit, but it was a particularly meaningful case for me. Due to the fact that her case needed immediate attention and required a lot of work, the unit would not have been able to accept her application for assistance if I had not been available. The idea that the chance presence of a summer intern is the only reason Rosie and her kids are not currently living on the street serves as a glaring reminder that there are so many more people in desperate need of legal services than can actually be helped.

Rosie was only one of the many wonderful clients I met and served during my 10 weeks at New Haven Legal Assistance. It was truly humbling to advocate for people who have bravely fought, and continue to fight, to overcome physical and mental disabilities, addiction, domestic violence, and other hardships to support their children and families. I am so grateful to Equal Justice America for helping to make this experience possible.

Sincerely,

Katherine Canny  
University of Michigan Law School  
J.D. Candidate, Class of 2016